



THE NAVAJO NATION

RUSSELL BEGAYE PRESIDENT
JONATHAN NEZ VICE PRESIDENT

CONTACT: Rick Abasta, Communications Director
Office of the President and Vice President
THE NAVAJO NATION
Phone: 928-871-7247
Fax: 928-871-4025
Email: rickabasta@gmail.com

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President Begaye, HUD Assistant Secretary Lourdes Castro-Ramirez Meet With Navajo Veterans on Housing Issue



U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development Assistant Secretary Lourdes Castro-Ramirez met with Navajo veteran commanders, Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs and NHA to discuss housing opportunities. (Photo by Rick Abasta)

FT. DEFIANCE, Ariz. September 11, 2015—Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye and Vice President Jonathan Nez remain committed to addressing the housing need of Navajo veterans and to that end, they brought together tribal and federal resources to find solutions to the housing crisis.

On Friday, Navajo veterans, Office of the President and Vice President, U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, Navajo Housing Authority, Department of Navajo Veterans Affairs, and the Southwest Office of Native American Programs met to discuss the homeless veterans issue.

President Begaye introduced Lourdes Castro-Ramirez, assistant secretary for HUD.

“We wanted to provide you

an opportunity to hear from her on where she stands on bringing HUD monies into the VA and on helping our veterans,” he said.

Speaking in Navajo, Vice President Nez said, “We appreciate our veterans and we remember you. We met with leaders in Washington, D.C. and told them our Navajo veterans and their families want homes.”

He said veterans are not shy about reminding the Begaye-Nez administration that Navajo veterans are number one on the four pillars of the administration.

“That’s the reason why we invited HUD. We look forward to your support for the Navajo Nation Veterans Act for approval by the Navajo Nation Council and getting it signed into law by President Begaye,” said Vice President Nez.

Castro-Ramirez

reaffirmed that HUD is committed to ending veteran homelessness. In 2010, the Obama administration launched Opening Doors, a comprehensive federal strategy to prevent and end homelessness.

“As we saw today, the funds allocated for affordable housing opportunities can be used to strengthen the community, like a new youth center, creation of a veterans home or a facility that is accessible by the community,” Castro-Ramirez said.

Since 2011, statistics indicate that numbers have decreased and veterans’ homelessness is down by 33 percent, she said. In 2014, Congress appropriated \$4 million for Tribal HUD Veterans Affairs Supportive Housing.

The partnership is a pilot project between HUD and the VA.

“Tribal HUD VASH is our first attempt at proving housing opportunities to veterans in Indian Country. It’s a pilot project with only \$4 million but it’s a start and we expect 600 veterans to be served,” Castro-Ramirez said.

HUD is allocated \$650 million for Native American programs, she said, which is not enough to address the need that exists. The funding amount has remained the same for the past 14 years.

The agency veteran commanders spoke about issues they faced with housing.

A common thread throughout was the trust land status of the Navajo Nation and the reluctance by banks to approve home loans on the reservation.

The commanders also raised the need for infrastructure and appliances for the homes, rather than just providing shells that must be completed by the veterans occupying the houses. The quality of the housing material was also questioned.

Aneva Yazzie, chief executive officer for NHA, said NAHASDA funding has strict eligibility guidelines with regard to income that must be complied with by applicants.

“The need is so much greater in Indian Country and that’s even more so with Navajo being the largest tribal land base,” Yazzie said.

“We look forward to working with President Begaye and NHA. We look forward to rolling out the Tribal HUD VASH in the next few months. We commend you all on keeping the focus on this important effort,” Castro-Ramirez said.

